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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: AQI BEGINS ANTICIPATED RAMADAN ATTACK SURGE

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: After a relatively quiet first ten days of Ramadan, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) began its anticipated surge of high-profile attacks on September 23 with a four-fold increase in the rate of attacks. Analysis suggests that AQI is primarily targeting two groups: the ISF and Sunni tribal members engaged in reconciliation efforts with Coalition Forces and the GOI. Even with this increased number of attacks, however, the current level of violence still lags behind the corresponding Ramadan period in 2006, a result of the damage Coalition operations have inflicted on Al-Qaeda in recent months. In addition, recent public statements by their leaders suggests that targeting the Sunni population may have the opposite effect than what was intended, i.e. strengthening the resolve of tribal leaders, in particular, to rid the area of AQI influence. End Summary.

Anticipated AQI Surge Begins

¶2. (S) AQI began its anticipated surge of high-profile attacks on September 23. In the last four days, they have launched 29 high-profile attacks, a four-fold increase in the rate of attacks over the first ten days. Between September 24 and 26, MNF-I estimates that these high-profile attacks killed 25 Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and 87 Iraqi civilians, wounded 118 ISF and 224 civilians. There was one Coalition Force (CF) casualty during this period.

ISF and Sunni Leaders Targeted

¶3. (S) CF intelligence analysis of these recent attacks suggests that AQI is primarily targeting two groups: the ISF and Sunni tribal members engaged in reconciliation efforts with CF and/or the GOI. In August, the ISF had several high-profile successes against AQI, most notably in Mosul where they found and cleared twelve out of twenty vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) before they could detonate. In Anbar on the 24th, the ISF prevented the detonation of a dump truck carrying over 6000 pounds of home-made bulk explosives. AQI has repeatedly stated their intent to target the ISF and was implicated in both aborted attacks. In similar fashion, AQI publicly declared it placed a high priority on attacking Sunni civilians who did not abide by their law or who cooperated with the CF. On September 24, they followed up this threat with a high-profile bombing in Baqubah at a reconciliation dinner. This attack -- which killed more than twenty guests, including the local police chief -- was almost certainly targeted against the Diyala provincial governor and the senior Sunni tribal leaders who were present.

Differences from Previous Surges

14. (S) There are some differences between the recent attacks and those which occurred during a similar period of increased AQI activity last April. At that time, VBIEDS accounted for hundreds of casualties; none of the recent attacks have approached that lethality. In April, a large percentage of the high-profile attacks targeted Shia civilians in Baghdad. As of the evening of the 27th, there has been only one attack against Shia civilians in Baghdad, and it was relatively ineffective. The AQI shift in targets was made all too clear on the first day of Ramadan with the assassination of the Sunni leader of the Anbar Awakening, Sheik Sattar al-Rishawi, which has been widely attributed to AQI.

15. (S) Even with this increased number of attacks, the current level of violence still lags behind the corresponding Ramadan period in 2006. In that year, during the first 14 days of Ramadan, there were a total of 60 high-profile attacks resulting in a total of 399 casualties. During the same 14 days this year, AQI has executed 33 high-profile attacks resulting in 371 casualties. MNF-I intelligence analysts assess that CF operations during late August and early September which targeted key AQI leaders may have preempted planned AQI activity as well as accounting for the ten-day delay to the start of the surge. The September 25 killing of senior Al-Qaeda leader Abu Usama al-Tunisi may also have an impact.

Comment

BAGHDAD 00003262 002 OF 002

16. (S) While AQI remains capable of conducting spectacular attacks, the constant pressure and continuous disruption are having an effect in mitigating damage and loss of life. Even though more high-profile attacks will likely occur during this Ramadan period, military intelligence analysts do not believe AQI can sustain this rate of attack much longer. Further, AQI's past use of indiscriminate violence stoked the resentment among Sunnis which led to the backlash against AQI in the first place. Localized precision attacks against key individuals -- like the one in Baqubah -- are intimidating, in that the success of the operation is a bloody reminder that AQI can still execute this type of operation. There are signs, though, that additional targeting of the Sunni population also strengthens Sunni resolve to rid the area of this threat to their security. End comment.

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